



The Bilyaks in Ternopil, Ukraine

4th Quarter Report, 2022

November

Dear friends, brothers and sisters, members of the BIEM mission, I praise the Lord for each of you, for your ministry to Ukraine with us, for your support, help, prayers, empathy...

During the war, we especially feel the church of Christ.

The other day the Lord allowed me to minister in the city of Kherson. Kherson is a Ukrainian city that has just been liberated from Russian invaders. This is a city heavily affected by Russian aggression and war.

Most of the people in this place were not ready for war. The war caught them by surprise. Literally a few days after the start of the war, this city was occupied. At the beginning of the occupation, when Russian troops were already in the city, people came out to protest. However, these protests were quickly suppressed, and darkness fell over the city in every sense of the word: emotional, political, military, informational, social, and economical.

For me, this city is special because two of my uncles live here, as well as three cousins and my sister. They know a lot about the Lord, they have repeatedly heard the Gospel, but they are still in search. We have prayed a lot for our relatives who remained under occupation. It was not realistic to help either physically or financially. Only from time to time was it possible to phone some of them, find out how they were, their experiences, and encourage them with words.

I was abroad when they started talking about the liberation of Kherson. When Kherson was liberated, I felt a call from the Lord to go to minister to the people of Kherson. Usually, I coordinate with local churches when I go to the front lines, but this time I desired to involve my relatives in work, ministry, and evangelism. It ended up being an excellent, blessed, fruitful, evangelistic trip.



As usual, our brothers and sisters from the church prepared food packages. Since I didn't plan to visit the military this time and didn't have any assistance for them, I was able to carry more help for civilians. Therefore, my trailer and my car were filled with aid for the people of Kherson. I had with me 115 boxes of 12-kilogram food packages, as well as medicines for those in need, and several boxes of solid soap.

The challenge of this trip was that I needed to find a city closer to Kherson where I could buy bread for the people. It looked like such a city was Kropyvnytskyi. On the Internet, I searched for the largest bread bakery and its phone numbers. So, I remotely arranged to buy 200 loaves of fresh bread. Therefore, I added another stop to my journey: a bakery in the city of Kropyvnytskyi.



In addition to food, I also carried a generator for Kherson. Some wealthier people owned generators, but there were few of them. However, the elderly suffer greatly from the lack of electricity. So, they requested a generator, if possible, for the sake of such ones and to enable people on surrounding streets to come and charge phones, etc.

As a result, my vehicle was filled to the ceiling, so I had to put my personal travel items in the passenger seat next to me. My trailer and car interior contained at least 1800 kilograms (3,968 lbs.) of help.

The closer I got to Kherson, the clearer it became there was a war here. Hostilities were taking place; occupiers were present. The roads have not been repaired; the asphalt is covered with caterpillar tracks from military equipment. Roadsides and flower beds are overgrown with weeds. Everywhere you see the remains of destroyed military equipment, destroyed gas stations, bus stops, cafes, schools, kindergartens, residential buildings... In some places, entire streets were demolished, all the houses in a row... Kherson, in terms of damage, suffered less, but the surrounding villages more so, if we consider the destroyed houses. However, the situation is changing. It seems that the occupiers have decided to destroy this city as well.

Today, the city of Kherson is a city where explosions are constantly heard. It is a city on the front line, where Russian troops are located literally across the Dnieper River, on the left bank, at a distance of 1 km, and residential areas are located on the right bank. The sounds of arriving rockets and cannon shells and the response from the artillery of the Ukrainian army are constantly heard.

Of the 300,000 pre-war population of Kherson, 80,000-100,000 people remained in the city. For most of these people the liberation became a holiday. Many videos on the Internet show Kherson residents hugging soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and this is understandable. I don't know if foreign



readers will understand what I write next, so I will explain. It is hard to imagine Ukrainians hugging the police, because the attitude towards the police, even now during the war, is ambiguous and difficult. But Kherson residents even hugged the police when Ukrainian authorities returned to the city.

In addition to the holiday, tension is also felt in society. Unfortunately, some people became collaborators. They supported and sympathized with the occupying Russian authorities, collaborating with them... The brightest and most active collaborators, of course, fled with the Russian army, but not all fled. Those who remained are now humiliated by neighbors, employees, and relatives. This is very noticeable in conversations with people.

December

Greetings dear brothers and sisters, personnel and partners of the BIEM mission.

Today is the 302nd day of the war. Usually, we do not count the days, but after yesterday the news reminded us of the “anniversary” figure. I can't even believe that in a month and a half it will be a year since the war started.

During this time the Lord has worked through us and through you. This is a time when we've seen the hand of God, felt His presence, experienced His mercy and His goodness, and felt His loving heart.

Thank you for being with us all this time, from the first day of the war and until now. Thank you for your generous donations, for your prayers, for your empathy and your tears with us.

I just made a trip to the front. Together with another local pastor, we visited the city of Bakhmut. Today it is perhaps one of the busiest cities in the world. The city of invincibility and struggle. This is my second trip here. I was here about two months ago and I must say that this city has become even more broken, shelled, destroyed, mutilated, and crippled ...

Of the 80,000 people who lived here before the full-scale war, a few thousand remain. This city is the front line, on the one side of the city there are areas where hostilities are taking place, and on the other side people are trying to build their lives.



As soon as you enter the city, you see destruction everywhere. In the eyes, in the truest sense of the word, torn wires are thrown. Broken local power lines, high-voltage lines, trolleybus lines ... these are not just darts, they are mainly powerful cables. All this hangs from above, trying at least to tear through your car, and on the ground, on the road, there are fallen power poles, funnels from shells. Therefore, it is highly

desirable not to drive here in the dark... There are other military reasons why you should not stay here after dark and not drive through the streets of Bakhmut at night.

People were waiting for us at a certain time, in a certain place. We arrived on time, which allowed us a few minutes to chat with people as a group. Alexander, the local pastor, gave an

introductory speech and then signaled for me to speak. My speech was on the topic "Has God done enough for me?" This is a question that worries many in Ukraine now, so I read the Gospel of John 3:16. I recalled God's love expressed in the fact that God gave His only begotten Son so that I and all of us could have the greatest thing – eternal life. The answer to the love of God must be our faith.



I had a little over 40 New Testaments with me, which I put on the fender of my trailer. We simply said, "Here are the New Testaments. Whoever wants one may take it." I did not bring home a single copy. All of them were picked up.

After that, we distributed food parcels. Both my short sermon and the distribution of food packages took place to the sound of explosions, so people quickly accepted a box of food, bread, and candles. We also had blankets and sleeping bags, which obviously weren't enough. By the time the people had gone home, it was already getting dark. We have very few grocery packages

left, only 10 boxes. We planned to make at least three stops to distribute aid, but at the first stop almost everything was distributed. So, a decision had to be made concerning the remainder. We knew there was a group of people living in a basement nearby. We decided to call on them and give this aid to them. It was the right decision. They were thrilled and grateful. These are 36 people from neighboring houses. They have already formed a certain rhythm of life. When it starts to get dark, they hole up in the basement, and in the morning they disperse to their apartments, where the windows are covered with plastic film because the glass has long been gone.

In total, I had 122 boxes, each containing 26.5 lbs. of groceries. The cost of each box was around \$17. Almost everywhere, people asked for flashlights, power banks, and batteries for flashlights. I had about 10 warm blankets, but this was negligible.

We left Bakhmut in almost total darkness. we were happy that we had served people and shared the Gospel. We prayed with people and for people.

I am returning 1000 kilometers to the west, but I know that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in the hearts of people, reminding these people of God's immense love for them. Thank you all for your participation in this ministry.

On this trip, I remembered an old joke: “One day you will find a crumpled disposable mask in the pocket of your winter jacket. And you will smile nostalgically while adjusting your bulletproof vest.”

With the best congratulations and words of gratitude,
Your brother in the Lord,
Vitaly Bilyak from Ternopil